

Regional Command (Southwest)

Public Affairs Office

Camp Leatherneck, Helmand province, Afghanistan



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Daily Media Summary: A daily look at news impacting coalition forces in RC(SW) **Jan.uary 29, 2014**



Combat Logistics Battalions 6 and 7 begin their combat logistics patrol from Camp Leatherneck, Afghanistan, to pick up equipment from Forward Operating Base Delaram, Jan. 16, 2014. Combat Logistics Battalion 7 is replacing CLB 6 which is currently deployed out of Camp Lejeune, N.C.

(U.S. Marine Corps Photo by Sgt. Frances Johnson)

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Helmand/ Nimroz/ Kandahar

1. Taliban Militants Killed While Placing Roadside Bombs in Helmand (Khaama)

Written by Ghanizada, Jan. 28, 2014

At least three Taliban militants were killed while placing improvised explosive device in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan.

The interior ministry of Afghanistan following a statement said the incident took place on Monday in Maraj district of Helmand province.

The statement further added that three Taliban militants were blown up while they were busy planting improvised explosive device (IED) on a roadside to target Afghan and coalition forces.

The Taliban militants group has not commented regarding the incident so far.

Taliban fighters frequently use improvised explosive device (IED) to target Afghan and coalition security forces, but in major cases Afghan civilians are targeted by IEDs.

At least six civilians were killed and 13 others were injured following an improvised explosive device (IED) explosion in Nomish district.

The incident took place late Sunday evening after a civilian vehicle struck with the improvised explosive device, planted by Taliban militants.

<http://www.khaama.com/taliban-militants-killed-while-placing-roadside-bombs-in-helmand-3359>

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2. Suicide Bomber Shot Dead in Helmand Province (Khaama) Ghanizada

Written by Ghanizada, Jan. 28, 2014

A suicide bomber was shot dead by Afghan security forces before he manage to reach his target in southern Helmand province of Afghanistan.

The suicide bomber was reportedly looking to attack the district police chief for Nad-e-Ali district, but was recognized and shot dead by Afghan police forces.

In the meantime, provincial governor spokesman, Omar Zwak confirming the report, said the suicide bomber detonated his explosives after Afghan security forces opened fire on him.

Helmand is among the volatile provinces in southern Afghanistan where Taliban militants are openly operating in its various districts.

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The anti-government armed militant groups have not commented regarding the incident so far.

<http://www.khaama.com/suicide-bomber-shot-dead-in-helmand-province-3364>

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3. Suicide Attack Organizers Arrested in Kandahar (Tolo News)

Written by Ghanizada, Jan. 28, 2014

A group of suicide attack organizers have been arrested in western Kandahar province, the National Directorate of Security Media Department said on Tuesday.

Fifteen insurgents including commander Dad Mohammad were arrested from various parts of Kandahar city, the statement from the NDS said.

Some light and heavy weapons were also seized from the group, the NDS said.

Insurgent activities have increased recently, ahead of presidential and provincial council elections in April.

<http://www.tolonews.com/en/afghanistan/13638-suicide-attack-organizers-arrested-in-kandahar>

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Afghanistan

4. Warlords Trying to Influence Poll Process (Pajhwok)

Written by Saifullah Maftoon, Jan. 28, 2014

GHAZNI CITY-- Warlords and gangsters are trying to influence the presidential and provincial council polls in southern Ghazni province to get their favourite candidates elected, residents and contenders alleged on Tuesday.

Nadir Khan Giruwal, a provincial council candidate, claimed warlords and mafia members were stronger than the government in Ghazni, where free and transparent elections would be impossible.

He asked the Independent Election Commission (IEC <<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/iec>>) and other authorities concerned to take tangible steps to rein in criminal groups to prevent rigging in the ballot.

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Voicing similar concerns, another provincial council runner Ali Daryab Salehi feared the elections in Ghazni would be unfair if measures were not adopted to reverse the use of force and meddling.

A resident of Ghazni City, Mohammad Asif, said escalating insecurity in the province offered a level playing field only to warlords and mafia.

But Governor Musa Khan Akbarzada promised nobody would be allowed to meddle in or rig the presidential and provincial council elections.

He hoped the elections would be conducted in a more transparent manner than in the past and they would not allow anyone to sabotage the process.

IEC's local office head Shah Jahan Sarwari also vowed to hold free polls, saying they would foil all fraud attempts with the help of security forces and observers.

<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/28/warlords-trying-influence-poll-process>

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5. Kerry Says Islamabad Vital for Afghan Security; Backs PM Sharif's Vision to Make Pakistan Tiger Eco (APP)

Written by Ali Imran, Jan. 27, 2014

WASHINGTON-- U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry Monday recognized Pakistan as vital partner for Afghan security and renewed Washington to commitment to deepen bilateral relationship with Islamabad.

Speaking at the start of Pakistan-U.S. Strategic Dialogue, the presence of American officials from several areas "demonstrates our commitment on the part of the United States to strengthen and to deepen our relationship, and to try to build as constructively as possible."

Kerry, a longtime supporter of Pakistan-U.S. ties, welcomed warmly the Pakistani delegation led by National Security Advisor by saying "good morning to all, to our friends from Pakistan, As-Salaam Alaikum." At the same time, he noted the challenges in the relationship.

"We all know there have been occasional hiccups and challenges, but we really believe that there are fundamental interests that we need to unite around, and particularly in economic and security spheres."

"Building stronger ties with the people of Pakistan - I emphasize, with the people of Pakistan broadly writ - has been a personal commitment of mine for some period of time,"

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said Kerry, who, as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, sponsored the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill on economic assistance for Islamabad.

He said there is a latest recommendation from the Secretary of Defense, which is before the Congress now, and “so we are continuing to provide a connection between the people of the United States and the people of Pakistan.”

Since Pakistan’s historic election last May, he said, the two countries have enjoyed even greater cooperation and a strengthening of ties across the entire spectrum of issues, from energy to security to education.

“I want to commend the tough choices the prime minister and his cabinet have made to reinvigorate Pakistan’s economy and the commitment that you have made to engage in serious reforms that will help to tap into the enormous potential of the people of Pakistan.”

The United States, he said, backs Prime Minister Sharif’s endeavors to turn Pakistan into a tiger economy for the 21st century.

“The United States has no doubt that Prime Minister Sharif’s policies will put Pakistan on a path towards a more prosperous future, and we fully support his goal of making Pakistan’s marketplace a tiger economy for the 21st century. Indeed, greater trade and investment between the United States and Pakistan will make both of our countries more prosperous, and it’s really a critical part of our efforts this week.”

The top American diplomat said the energy-related ties are a preview of the economic relationship’s potential. Since the fall of 2009 the United States has already helped to add 1,000 megawatts of capacity to Pakistan’s grid, and we have been able to do much of it with renewable energy. “We believe there are additional areas where we can collaborate in order to support greater energy production, and also improve distribution and reforms that will attract greater investment.”

The United States has also partnered with Pakistan to make significant investments in traditional infrastructure, including the construction of 900 kilometers of roadways in regions that border Afghanistan, including the four main trade routes between the two countries.

“More broadly, the United States and Pakistan continue to have a vital, shared, strategic interest in pursuit of a Pakistan that is at the center of an economically diverse region and a dynamic South Asian marketplace.”

Kerry acknowledged that Pakistanis have suffered the most at the hands of terrorism.

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"We appreciate the efforts of the Pakistani Government and the civil society to stand up against extremists, and your struggle to develop a Pakistan where every Pakistani has a say and a stake in Pakistan's success against extremism."

"I think few have suffered more at the hands of terrorists and extremists than the people of Pakistan. Many people in the world are not aware of how many of your citizens you have lost in this struggle.

And we also have a common cause and a common obligation to be partners for one another's prosperity in the fight against those who want to limit opportunity and take Pakistan backwards. That is also why it remains essential for the United States and Pakistan to continue to find avenues of cooperation on counterterrorism, on nuclear security."

On Afghanistan, the U.S. diplomat said Islamabad is a vital partner. "We recognize that Pakistan is a vital partner in supporting a secure Afghanistan, and we know how closely Pakistan's own security is linked to Afghanistan's success.

That's why addressing the threats posed to both Pakistan and Afghanistan by cross-border militancy is a key aspect of our conversations this week."

"The reinvigoration of this Strategic Dialogue, we believe, is an important symbol of our strengthening ties across a broad spectrum of our mutual interests. And where we have differences, we pledge to work through them, as friends and as partners do, in an effort to make our relationship stronger and more open for the long term."

http://www.app.com.pk/en /index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=262666&Itemid=39

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World

6. UN Experts Arrive in Tehran to Visit Uranium Mine (AFP)

Written by AFP, Jan. 28, 2014

TEHRAN - UN nuclear inspectors arrived in Tehran Tuesday to visit Iran's Gachin uranium mine for the first time in several years, Atomic Energy Organisation Behrouz Kamalvandi said.

"These three inspectors are scheduled to travel tomorrow to Bandar Abbas province to visit the Gachin mine," Kamalvandi was quoted by state news agency IRNA as saying.

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The scope of the visit "will be only to the extent of what they need (to know)," said Kamalvandi, referring to "managed access" to the mine that is among six steps of a framework deal reached with the UN atomic watchdog in November.

As part of the first phase of the deal, UN experts visited the heavy water plant at the unfinished Arak reactor on December 8, when all of the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) "technical objectives" were met, the Vienna-based agency said.

The Arak reactor, still under construction, is a major source of concern for Western powers, who fear the plutonium it will produce as a by-product could provide Iran with an alternative route to an atomic bomb.

The deal also allows UN experts to visit Gachin -- which has been off-limits to them since 2005.

As it stands, Iran is only obliged to inform the IAEA three months before it transfers fissile material into a nuclear facility.

Iran also reached a landmark deal in November with the so-called P5+1 group -- the United States, China, Russia, Britain, France and Germany -- on its disputed nuclear drive, which the West suspects has military dimensions, despite Tehran's denial.

<http://news.yahoo.com/un-experts-arrive-tehran-visit-uranium-mine-000220202.html>

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7. Australia Fears Domestic Extremism From Syria Conflict (Agence France Presse)

Written by AFP, Jan. 28, 2014

The conflict in Syria poses new risks of homegrown extremism in Australia, with citizens returning radicalised after fighting there, AFP reports according to the government.

Attorney General George Brandis said the civil war which has left more than 130,000 dead and forced millions from their homes presented a "complex set of global security challenges" that extend far beyond the Syrian border.

Two men were arrested in Australia in December and charged with foreign incursion offences after fighting alongside rebel groups in Syria and there have been "several reported deaths of Australian citizens (in Syria)," Brandis told the inaugural Interpol Global Security and Counter-Terrorism Convention in Sydney.

"In Australia, like many other countries, we are witnessing a growing trend of citizens travelling offshore to engage in, or support terrorist activities or conflict," he said.

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"These individuals not only potentially breach Australian laws and commit offences offshore, but upon their return to Australia they pose a significant national security risk," Brandis added.

"Those who actively participate in combat or assist in the planning and facilitation of such activity can become radicalised and obtain new skills -- including the ability to conduct an attack on Australian soil, radicalise others and impart knowledge and skills gained offshore."

The assessment echoes police warnings in Britain last week that anyone returning from Syria faced arrest, with 16 people detained on suspicion of terror offences so far this month after arriving back from the war-torn nation. That compares with 24 in the whole of 2013.

Scores of Europeans have already lost their lives in the bloody three-year conflict and hundreds more have joined the fighting, troubling the region's leaders.

Brandis said the Syrian conflict was also stoking tensions between Australia's Sunni, Shia and Alawi Muslim communities, leading to local outbreaks of violence.

He said there was a "real" threat of an extremist attack on Australian soil, with 23 people charged to date under anti-terror laws brought in after the September 11 attacks in New York.

Tactics had shifted to "lone-actor, smaller-scale, multi-mode attacks," the attorney-general added, creating "significant difficulties for law enforcement and intelligence agencies" in detecting and disrupting potential plots.

More than 110 Australians have died in extremist attacks since 2001, Brandis told the conference, including the suicide bombings on the Indonesian tourist island of Bali in 2002 and 2005 which killed 92 Australians.

Some 200 law enforcement officers from 60 nations are attending the Interpol event.

<http://en.tengrinews.kz/crime/Australia-fears-domestic-extremism-from-Syria-conflict-25628/>

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Other News

8. State of the Union: Obama Calls for Action, with or without Congress (CNN)

Written by Tom Cohen, Chelsea J. Carter and Leigh Ann Caldwell, Jan. 28, 2014

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WASHINGTON-- The year of action. That's what 2014 is all about for President Barack Obama, and it was the underlying theme of Tuesday night's State of the Union address.

"Let's make this a year of action," Obama said. "That's what most Americans want -- for all of us in this chamber to focus on their lives, their hopes, their aspirations."

It's an optimistic goal for a President with a 43% approval rating entering his sixth year in office and facing a determined opposition otherwise known as the House of Representatives.

Speaking from the lectern inside the House chamber for his fifth State of the Union address, Obama outlined his goals and priorities that included economic opportunity, energy and education.

In other words, with up to 535 members of Congress sitting in the same room during his speech, the President told them that he's going to go around them if necessary. One way is by using his pen to sign executive orders -- unilateral presidential directives.

Obama called for more government support to rebuild the nation's infrastructure, but warned he was willing to go it alone.

"I will act on my own to slash bureaucracy and streamline the permitting process for key projects, so we can get more construction workers on the job as fast as possible," he said.

The Republican Party has balked at the idea.

Speaking to reporters earlier Tuesday, House Speaker John Boehner said Republicans are "just not going to sit here and let the President trample all over us."

Obama also chided congressional Republicans for trying to undermine his signature health care law, which passed in 2010 without GOP support.

"The American people aren't interested in refighting old battles," Obama said.

"Let's not have another 40-something votes to repeal a law that's already helping millions of Americans. ...The first 40 were plenty. ... We all owe it to the American people to say what we're for, not just what we're against."

This year's State of the Union is a defining test for Obama

Separately, the President also unveiled a proposal for a new type of account that allows Americans to save for retirement.

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Obama said he will order the U.S. Treasury to create a new federal retirement savings account called MyRA, a savings bond that he added would guarantee "a decent return with no risk of losing what you put in." It will be available to those whose jobs don't offer traditional retirement savings programs, he said.

Additionally, Obama called for:

-- Eliminating \$4 billion in tax subsidies for the fossil fuel industries "that don't need it" and instead "invest more in fuels of the future that do.

-- Women who make 77 cents for each dollar a man earns to get equal pay for equal work, adding "that is wrong, and in 2014, it's an embarrassment."

-- Setting new fuel standards for American trucks to help reduce U.S. oil imports "and what we pay at the pump."

-- Reworking the corporate tax code. He urged Congress to work with him to close "wasteful, complicated loopholes that punish businesses investing here" and instead "lower tax rates for businesses that create jobs right here at home."

-- Congress to close the prison at Guantanamo Bay in 2014.

Obama also reiterated that he will veto any new sanctions bill from Congress that would derail talks on preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapon, adding that "for the sake of our national security, we must give diplomacy a chance to succeed."

Brazile: Obama's message: A dysfunctional Congress, but we'll get it done anyway
Even as the President cited a growing economy and increasing corporate profits, Obama said average wages have been flat.

He announced an executive order impacting the minimum wage, an issue that has not received a lot of traction yet in Congress as Republicans largely oppose any federal increase, saying it will place a burden on employers.

He asked Congress to get on board with a Democratic proposal to raise the federal minimum to \$10.10 per hour.

Obama also promised an executive order to raise the minimum wage for some government contract workers. While the action is relatively narrow and affects less than half a million people, the hope is that this will spur Congress to follow suit for all low-wage workers in the U.S.

<http://www.cnn.com/2014/01/28/politics/2014-state-of-the-union/>

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